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TAKING LIBRARY LIAISON FACULTY TEAMS FROM GOOD TO GREAT

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Abstract

Liaison Librarians and liaison services are critical to the success of libraries and library services. Gone are the days when Liaison Librarians can spend the majority of their time selecting resources and teaching information literacy into undergraduate classes. In these critical times they need to be broad in knowledge, well connected, agile in nature and possess all-encompassing skills.

QUT Library has a liaison team model established in 2012 where Faculty Teams are assigned to the QUT International College and each of the 6 faculties within QUT. Within each team there are three lead roles - Learning and Teaching Lead, Research Lead, and Information Resources Lead.

Although this model was a success library staff highlighted that often plans and strategies were developed in isolation, skills gaps were an issue and too much time was spent on reporting. In 2015 a further review of the Library Liaison Faculty Teams was undertaken to ensure Teams were still relevant and essential in an academic environment and addressing the needs of all stakeholders – students, academics and researchers. Achieving further success was paramount to ensuring a robust partnership with faculties and being able to achieve the University's strategic ambition.

A comprehensive literature review identified the challenges and successes of national and international liaison roles and models. Broad consultation with key QUT stakeholders was undertaken where strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the Teams and their services were identified and discussed.

Thirty-four recommendations for change were identified, including:

- Library Liaison Faculty planning cycle to align with faculty's strategic planning cycle and target 1-3 faculty priorities;
- The introduction of a blended learning lead role within teams;
- Development of a skills audit to identify skills gaps and also champions within roles;
- Sharing of skilled staff across faculty teams;
- Assigning teams to Divisions within the University as well as Faculty;
- Rationalisation and simplification of reporting.

Keywords

liaison librarian, library liaison faculty team, support for learning, faculty partnership, library services, collaboration,

Introduction to Queensland University of Technology

Queensland University of Technology (QUT) is a public research university located in the urban coastal city of Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. QUT has three campuses: Gardens Point, Kelvin Grove and Caboolture.

With some 47 000 students, including nearly 8 000 international students, and an annual budget of more than \$800 million, QUT has positioned itself to continue to grow and develop as one of Australia's leading universities.

QUT has over 4 000 staff members, of which 2 500 are academic staff. It has six faculties, an international college, a number of divisions and a growing number of research institutes.

Introduction to QUT Library

QUT Library has four branch libraries - Caboolture Library, Gardens Point Library, Kelvin Grove Library and the QUT Law Library, each providing resources and services to support the learning, teaching and research needs of the students and staff of their campus or faculty.

The QUT Library collection is largely online. In 2015 there were 661 392 ebooks, 99 992 ejournals and 25 842 online videos. The print collection consists of 448 056 books and 746 journal titles. During 2015 there were over 2 578 000 visits to the library with 120 738 Helpdesk enquires and 8 824 chat and email enquiries.

The library services provided directly to faculties and research institutions are provided by Library Liaison Faculty Teams. These teams are made up of a variety of roles and include Liaison Librarians, Academic Skills Advisers and Library Advisers.

The teams currently provide support for learning and teaching as well as research. They contribute to information resource management within their faculty areas, provide workshops and training for their faculty, contribute to curriculum development and review, data management, and attend and contribute to many faculty meetings. Liaison teams are a direct link to an extensive range of services provided and supported by the Library and the Division of Technology, Information and Learning Support.

Background

The Library Liaison Faculty Teams did not always contribute to their current areas of support. Prior to 2011 their core focus was learning and teaching support with research support not being within their scope. A review of Library Liaison Faculty Services was undertaken in 2011. There were a number of factors that prompted the 2011 Review:

- The strong university commitment to both teaching and learning, and research.
- Major changes to the library service model that impacted on liaison teams including their roles and responsibilities, workloads and priorities, and the required skills to successfully undertake role related tasks.
- The opportunity to consider a variety of liaison models within other Australian university libraries that addressed the needs of the QUT environment.
- Expectation and support from staff that the time was right to conduct a review of the liaison service.

Thirty-seven major recommendations were implemented in the following areas: the scope and model of the liaison service, faculty team allocation, defining priorities, roles and responsibilities, information resource allocation, and leadership and management. Implementation of these recommendations occurred throughout 2012.

In 2015 a light review of the Library Liaison Faculty Teams was undertaken to determine if the desired goals of the 2011 review were achieved and to ensure the service was operating efficiently and effectively, and meeting the needs of all key stakeholders. This proved timely as at around the same time it was announced that three vacant Liaison Librarian positions would not be filled. So the challenge became not only to review the service but also to ensure continuity of services with reduced staffing.

The Process

Key stakeholders were identified and included Assistant Deans, Heads of Schools, Course Coordinators, Academic staff and Researchers. It was critical that the Library Liaison Faculty Teams also had a strong voice in the review process; after all they knew their business within the faculties and schools better than anyone else. They needed to clearly identify their essential roles and services within the faculty including what could be classified as 'nice to have' and most importantly, and hardest to do, identify what they could stop doing.

Face to face workshops and interviews were undertaken, additionally, staff were provided with the option to provide written submissions and online feedback including anonymous feedback if preferred.

Environmental Scan

An environmental scan was undertaken to assess recent developments in academic library liaison services. The scan included a literature review and visits to three academic libraries in New South Wales and several university libraries in Singapore, The Netherlands and Germany.

In regard to the Australian libraries, a broad scan was conducted to determine which academic libraries were similar to QUT Library and to identify points of departure. Macquarie University, The University of Newcastle and The University of Wollongong libraries were chosen because of their similarity in size, multiple branches and rankings. The broad scan revealed an array of structures, with two main structures dominating the landscape: individual liaison librarians providing research support, delivering teaching and monitoring collections for schools within a faculty; and librarians providing support for a whole faculty but separating research support and teaching within a team, with one librarian providing and managing all faculty contact. All provided tiered support services of varying levels, from online self-help resources to individual consultations from referrals.

The international libraries visited were National Library of Singapore, Singapore Management University, Nanyang Technological University, Delft University of Technology, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam Public Library and Stuttgart University.

Library Visits Summary

The three Australian university libraries had a structure that consisted of a librarian conducting the academic outreach and a second group of librarians specifically conducting the teaching and in one library research support. Role descriptions included Library and Research Services Librarian, Client Services Librarian, Research Librarian and Librarian. The librarians responsible for contact with the academics and research support were described as Academic Outreach Librarian, Discipline Group Leader, and Faculty Librarian. All three universities reported satisfaction with the structure as it allowed staff to perform one or two services well. Two university libraries reported using an Access database to record interactions with academics, as this allowed better reporting and reviewing of the relationship. All three commented on the need to find the right balance between teaching support and academic research support.

Two university libraries reported having membership on most faculty boards and were able to provide input into the curriculum process in the early stages. One university library had embedded information literacy sessions into undergraduate classes primarily for the foundation courses, indigenous and international students. The embedded process meant engagement in different weeks throughout the semester and accounted for 10% of student assessments. Feedback suggested that the foundation students developed a stronger understanding of university study.

One university library provided online information literacy modules which had to be completed by students within their first year of study. Postgraduates were also encouraged to complete the modules. The university highlighted aiming to develop a culture of relationships not transactions.

The majority of international libraries were still focused on librarians supporting reference enquiries and services to undergraduates, with many just exploring support services to learning

and teaching and supporting research. One university stated faculties were employing their own librarians and these staff had little to no interaction with the broader library staff.

Another university had product teams instead of faculty teams. At the time of my visit they had planned to progress to more of a faculty model however they had identified that there was only minimal interest in the role of liaison librarian from library staff. The majority of library staff continued to show strong interest in continuing to work on the reference desk.

The outcomes of the visits resulted in identifying that the QUT Library Liaison Faculty Teams already offered a much broader spectrum of services and had a broader staffing model compared to the visited international universities.

Literature Review Summary

The literature reviewed consisted of publications post 2011, the date of the previous liaison review, and supported the recommendations implemented from the review.

In general it examined how liaison work should be assessed and the challenges faced in liaison outreach. The literature acknowledged the variety and complexity of the roles that make up the liaison team, in particular the role of the liaison librarian (Cooke *et al*, 2011; Delaney and Bates, 2015; Silver, 2014; Australian Library and Information Association, 2014; Crawford, 2012). Silver (2014) described the role as moving away from collection specialist to facilitating communication with, and connecting, library users. Others (Childress and Hickey, 2014; Auckland, 2012; Henry, 2012; Australian Library and Information Association, 2014) recognised the value of subject specialisation.

Measuring assessment, collaboration and leadership were the key themes. Assessing the liaison team's work with the faculty needed to move away from focussing on measuring activity to evaluating impact, that is, measuring the impact on an individual or community (Cooke *et al*, 2011; Creaser and Spezi, 2014).

Delaney and Bates (2015), Creaser and Spezi (2014) stated that looking for opportunities to add value and demonstrate impact could be achieved through partnering or collaborating with faculty. The required approach was for libraries to move from a service approach to a partnership approach. Delaney and Bates (2015) identified a familiar list of trends affecting university library liaison teams: open access, altmetrics, competition with Google, decline of the traditional OPAC, changing higher education space regarding MOOCs, the expectations of users who are moving away from the physical library.

Mack (2014) explored individual assessment that should be linked to work plans and annual reviews. Mack (2014) describes the liaison service as similar to a consultant in a business context. By demonstrating how they can facilitate the work of the faculties they can then assess their continued importance to the intellectual life of the faculty. Changing the language used to describe the relationship from *activity* to how the liaison teams *benefit* the university at a broader level needs be conferred to higher levels.

Henry (2012) suggested that we consider how well we train or induct librarians new to a liaison role and that a formal approach is required. This formal approach to establishing the new liaison role would create a more holistic and improved approach to measuring impact. Mary Auckland (2012), author of the Research Libraries UK report (RLUK), identified that researchers were not aware of developments in libraries and the expertise of librarians, requiring practical evidence of the direct value of research tools and services. Scholarly communication is a key area of support identified by Childress and Hickey (2014), Auckland (2012), Australian Library and Information Association (2014) and others. Research support is deepening: supporting open access, data curation, library supported publication models and digital scholarship (Childress and Hickey, 2014; Auckland, 2012). McBain *et al* (2013) discussed the library and information science practitioner as researcher, consequently contributing to the library/faculty relationship by shifting the relationship to that of peer.

Collaboration and partnering are important shifts that need to be realised to enable better evaluation and assessment of impact. Pham and Tanner (2015) and Jaguszewski and Williams (2013) define collaboration as a joint working, learning and sharing process with clear identification of roles and responsibilities among all levels. Pham and Tanner (2015) state that without collaboration between librarians and academics, information literacy efforts lack relevance and value because cross-disciplinary teamwork is important to develop new (*sic* improved, innovative, dynamic, evidence-based) ways of teaching. Pham and Tanner (2014) describe the technologies that enable collaboration: connecting teaching systems with the library (Blackboard), embed in faculty meetings, get automatically linked to the LMS, develop strategies to minimise the negative impacts of hierarchical and bureaucratic structures on collaboration.

SWOT analysis of the QUT Library Liaison Faculty Teams

Library Liaison Faculty Teams

Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the teams and their services were identified and discussed from separate consultations with the QUT Library Leadership Team, Library Service Managers, library staff and divisional directors. Outcomes from these meetings were collected, collated and common themes identified.

It was strongly communicated that QUT Library's reputation is "outstanding" and the focus on relationships is "very strong". Library Liaison Faculty Teams were recognised as having a solid identity within faculties with a proven commitment to client support. The discipline approach rather than specialisation was identified as an important aspect. The focus on teaching and learning, research support and information resources had deep benefits to the faculties and in the long term, the university.

Common themes for areas of improvement from library staff were around ambiguous priorities, role clarification, over reporting, duplication and over use of email, and issues around sharing of information, ideas and successes. Additionally, it was identified that the purpose and functions of the lead roles was not consistent across teams and also needed further clarification.

Academic Staff

Academic and professional staff were interviewed to provide a client perspective on the liaison services.

Academics were more than satisfied with the services and the quality of service that the Library Liaison Faculty Teams provided. The majority knew their liaison librarian well and spoke highly of them and the work they perform. They valued the support from the teams and the library in general. They felt there was good engagement and as a result demand for services was growing.

There was some feedback in regard to duplication of library workshops for students and a need to be more strategic with teaching into classes.

Impact evaluation was mentioned more than once, further identifying that the majority of faculty reporting was quantitative. There was also mention in regard to confusion about 'who, what and where' in relation to support, both support for learning and support for research.

Technology, Information and Learning Support (TILS) staff

TILS Directors identified missed opportunities for gathering and sharing of intelligence. The majority of information gathered and shared by Library Liaison Faculty Teams was in regard to Library services and support and it was identified this could be extended to all TILS services and support.

Partnerships within the Division appeared robust although meetings, catch-ups and information sharing were often unstructured. Further engagement around course transformation was identified and the importance of all support services being agile enough to participate as and when required.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Thirty-four recommendations were approved as a result of the 2015 review. All recommendations were based on keeping QUT clients at the centre of services and continuing to align services around their needs. Recommendations also aimed to support stakeholder feedback in regard to efficiencies, impact and sustainability.

Planning

At the commencement of each academic year Library Liaison Faculty Teams developed a Library Liaison Faculty Plan. These plans were scripted into a very structured template with a purpose of guiding priorities and activities, and providing direction to Library Liaison Faculty Teams. These annual plans aimed to support the goals of the QUT Library Future Direction document and also align with Faculty Strategic Plans. Each Plan had a learning and teaching, research support and information resource management focus. The review identified that Library Liaison Faculty Plans were not consistently developed in conjunction with Faculty priorities, nor were they always presented or discussed with Faculty stakeholders once finalised.

To better understand the business and priorities of the Schools that the Faculty Teams partner with, post review they now have in place a 'School Information Document'. This valuable information source is kept up to date by Lead Roles so that all Library Liaison Faculty Team members know key stakeholders, research activities and income, notable achievers, degree programs, accreditation process and meetings to attend within Schools and Faculties.

The Library Liaison Faculty Plans are now written with consideration of the Faculty's strategic priorities and timed to align with faculty strategic planning. The Library Liaison Faculty Teams now narrow their focus to the 1-3 key strategic activities that are a priority to their Faculty and the plans are now a true planning tool with teams able to not only report on activities but also evaluate their impact by providing qualitative outcomes. Consultation with the Faculty is now a key part of the process.

Lead Roles

Within each team there were three lead roles - Learning and Teaching Lead, Research Lead and Information Resources Lead. These lead roles were predominately assigned to Liaison Librarians however there was no clear clarification about the function of lead roles and it varied within teams.

With the 2015 review the purpose and role of all lead roles is now clearly defined. To further align with the University a blended learning lead role has been developed and due to a strong reliance on approval plans and demand-driven acquisition the Information Resources lead role has moved from being faculty based to campus based.

To ensure transfer of skills and knowledge and reduce a 'single point of failure' model lead roles are extended to other staff not only Liaison Librarians and are now rotated on a biennial basis via expression of interest.

Communication with Schools and Faculties

The majority of academic staff engage in teaching and research roles. Their time is heavily committed and they can often be challenged by conflicting priorities. With this in mind Library Liaison Faculty Teams had to ensure best use of their time with Faculty staff. To avoid a number of Divisional and Support for Learning service providers all wanting Faculty time the Liaison Librarians needed to ensure that they were gathering and sharing all the necessary intelligence from across the Division and the University's Support for Learning Services. Although Faculty staff identified that they were aware of Support for Learning Services, there was also mention of confusion about 'who, what and where' in relation to this support.

As a result key stakeholders from the various Library Liaison Faculty Teams have engaged with other Support for Learning service providers at QUT to collaborate in curriculum planning. This

curriculum planning initiative aims to better coordinate and integrate the support offered to Faculties across Support for Learning service providers. This collaborative approach also helps to raise awareness of the potential support available to Faculty staff and facilitates a targeted, evidence-based approach within Support for Learning.

The final outcome is to provide flexible and multi-modal support for a diverse range of student capabilities, aspirations, knowledge and pathways; encourage student self-responsibility by offering them the most appropriate advice, tools and access to support their learning; facilitate the integration and efficient delivery of support for learning strategies through curricular and co-curricular design; and helping to foster a sense of belonging by actively linking students, staff and the broader community together.

Initially three courses have been identified for support in Semester 1, 2016 and Library Liaison Faculty Teams are working with key stakeholders to embed this support into course content by enabling the learner support approach described above.

Communication across Teams

Prior to the 2015 review although the Faculty Teams worked well together much of the work in was done in isolation from other Faculty Teams. This did not support strong collaboration or sharing and could often lead to dispersed intelligence and duplication of effort.

To support current business strategy and to help meet future demands Teams had to develop a mechanism to capture and share team intelligence to meet the growing need for University wide intelligence combined with local team expertise. This involved redesigning the information architecture of current information management practices. The redesign was role based as opposed to team based and was conducive to information sharing on a much wider scale. It was more-user centric, simplified and standardised. It enabled sharing of best practice, exemplars, new initiatives and other learnings across teams.

Reduction of the Less Strategic Workload

Identification of common themes for areas of refinement from Library staff were around what was deemed the 'administrative workload' of their roles. Meetings, reporting and emails were identified as being 'taxing' on the Library Liaison Faculty Teams and an area which they needed to reduce time spent to focus on their more strategic priorities.

As a result the following were identified and implemented:

- Cease duplication and resending of emails by library supervisors/managers e.g. If an email goes out there is no need to resend to advise staff to attend, read, respond etc.
- Representatives from the Library Liaison Faculty Teams implemented a process across the whole of library staff to place a descriptive word on the subject line of all emails so that it is clearly evident to the receiver/s their role in the communication e.g. Information only, for action.
- A library wide review of all email lists was undertaken and rationalized as necessary, including membership.
- Committee meeting schedules are reviewed annually and committees are encouraged to have meetings utilizing technology to reduce travel.
- Biannual reports to Assistant Deans Learning and Teaching and Assistant Deans Research will be the basis for other reporting requirements.

Conclusion

Library Liaison Faculty Teams have proven to be a successful model for QUT. They have a broad scope in the roles they fill, ranging from learning and teaching (including blended learning), research support and information resource management.

As they work more strategically within their Faculties they have a stronger focus on the priorities of the Faculty to ensure they continue to remain relevant and valued. They work towards outcomes, impact and partnerships and report on the same.

As we continue to move forward Library Liaison Faculty Teams services and models will require regular reviewing so that the Library Liaison Faculty Teams continue to deliver innovative and creative strategies to meet the learning needs of diverse groups of students, the varied requirements of teaching and research staff and broader QUT community.

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